



Randy Gluth gives public testimony on a proposal to end fluoridation of Sitka’s water, during Tuesday’s Sitka Assembly meeting. (Sentinel Photo)

Assembly Votes Against Fluoride as Ballot Issue

**By SHANNON HAUGLAND
Sentinel Staff Writer**

After hearing more than two hours of testimony for and against, the Assembly voted Tuesday night against putting a proposal on the fall ballot to remove fluoride from city water.

Sitka has been fluoridating its drinking water since the 1950s in accordance with a practice recommended by health authorities to reduce the incidence of tooth cavities in the population.

The vote was 3-4 with Richard Wein, Aaron Bean and Steven Eisenbeisz voting in favor; Kevin Knox, Ben Miyasato, Bob Potrzuski and Mayor Matt Hunter voted against putting it on the ballot.

An unexpected second motion followed, to remove fluoridation from the city’s water system. That motion failed 2-5, with Eisenbeisz and Bean voting in favor.

“The votes will stay the same,” Eisenbeisz said in making the motion. “If we left this option on the table, it’s still hanging over our heads. ... We will put it to bed for the time being.”

There was a large turnout of people wanting to speak for or against the agenda item listed as “Discussion/Direction regarding the removal of fluoride from municipal drinking water.” After the Assembly voted not to have a public vote, and before the second vote on fluoride, most of the audience had left.

Assembly members arguing in favor of a public vote said they felt it should be up to the citizens to decide.

Bean said he felt it was not about whether fluoride in the water system was beneficial or not; it was about choice.

“People should have the right to not have this in their water if they don’t want it to be in their water,” he said. “I don’t want government deciding what’s best for me. People who feel it should be there can get out there and show up.”

Those members arguing against a public vote said they were convinced of the benefits of fluoridation, were concerned about misinformation being circulated, and felt comfortable making the decision as Assembly members.

“It should stay at this table,” Knox said. “We’re elected to represent and make these decisions. ... If we continue to kick decisions to the community what is the point of this body?”

Wein, who is a medical doctor, said he sees a public vote as a chance for public debate and discussion.

“It’s an opportunity to see how people will explore the issue – both sides of the issue, and try to make a reasoned decision,” he said. “It will be a test of Sitka’s ability to reason out what is best for themselves.”

“The science to me is crystal clear,” Potrzuski said. “The entire medical community is on one side. It’s pretty

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Teen Opens Fire at Fla. School; Toll at 17

PARKLAND, Fla. (AP) — A former student opened fire at a Florida high school Wednesday, killing at least 17 people and sending scores of students fleeing into the streets in the nation’s deadliest school shooting since a gunman attacked an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut.

Frantic parents rushed to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School to find SWAT team members and ambulances surrounding the campus as classes prepared to dismiss for the day. Live footage showed emergency workers who appeared to be treating the wounded on sidewalks.

“It is a horrific situation,” said Robert Runcie, superintendent of the school district in Parkland, about an hour’s drive north of Miami. “It is a horrible day for us.”

The 19-year-old suspect was taken into custody without a fight about an hour after he left the scene, authorities said.

Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel said the suspect, who was previously expelled for disciplinary reasons, had at least one rifle and multiple magazines.

“It’s catastrophic. There really are no words,” Israel said on Twitter.

Most of the fatalities were inside the building, though some victims were found fatally shot outside, the sheriff said.

The gunman was identified as Nicolas Cruz by a U.S. official briefed on the investigation. The official spoke

on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the information publicly.

In a cul-de-sac near the school, Michael Nembhard was sitting in his garage when he saw a young man in a burgundy shirt walking down the street. In an instant, a police cruiser pulled up and officers jumped out with guns drawn.

“All I heard was ‘Get on the ground! Get on the ground!’ Nembhard said. He said he could not see the suspect’s face, but that the man got on the ground without incident.

The day started normally at the school, which had a morning fire drill, and students were in class around 2:30 p.m. when another alarm sounded.

Noah Parness, a 17-year-old ju-

nior, said he and the other students calmly went outside to their fire-drill areas when he suddenly heard popping sounds.

“We saw a bunch of teachers running down the stairway, and then everybody shifted and broke into a sprint,” Parness said. “I hopped a fence.”

Beth Feingold said her daughter, Brittani, sent a text at 2:32 p.m. that said, “We’re on code red. I’m fine,” but sent another text shortly afterward saying, “Mom, I’m so scared.”

Brittani later was able to escape the school, which is one of the largest in the state, with about 3,000 students.

Inside the school, students heard loud bangs as the shooter fired. Many of them hid under desks or in closets and barricaded doors.

Television footage showed those students who fled leaving in a single-file line with their hands over their heads as officers urged them to evacuate quickly. Parents hurried to the scene.

Caesar Figueroa said when he got to the school to check on his 16-year-old daughter, he saw police officers drawing machine guns as they approached the campus.

“My wife called me that there was an active shooter, and the school was on lockdown. I got on the road and saw helicopters. ... It was crazy and my daughter wasn’t answering her phone.” She finally texted him that she was inside a closet with friends.

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Parents wait for news after a reports of a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., today. (AP Photo/Joel Auerbach)

Trump Breaks Silence on Domestic Violence

WASHINGTON (AP) — Breaking his silence about abuse, President Donald Trump said today he’s “totally opposed to domestic violence.” He commented amid growing pressure to speak out after allegations that a top White House aide had abused two former wives.

“Everybody knows” his position, Trump said, but “now you hear it.”

The president’s remarks came more than a week after the allegations against former White House staff secretary Rob Porter first became public. Porter resigned a week ago. He has denied the allegations.

Trump had praised Porter, his former staff secretary, on Friday in his first comments about the allegations. And on Saturday, he appeared to cast doubt on the women’s allegations when he tweeted:

“Peoples lives are being shattered and destroyed by a mere allegation.”

The White House’s handling of the Porter situation has engulfed senior West Wing officials, calling into question the decision-making and candor of chief of staff John Kelly and White House counsel Don McGahn.

Trump’s comments come as lawmakers on Capitol Hill launched a probe into how Porter was allowed to work at the White House under an interim security clearance despite allegations of spousal abuse.

Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, sent letters to the FBI and White House on Wednesday as his panel opened an investigation into the matter.

House Speaker Paul Ryan was asked Wednesday about how the White House has handled the Porter allegations, and whether Trump needs to publicly condemn domestic violence.

“Clearly, we all should be condemning domestic violence,” Ryan told reporters. “And if a person who commits domestic violence gets in the government, then there’s a breakdown in the system. There’s a breakdown in the vetting system and that breakdown needs to be addressed.”

Ryan’s comments and word of the House probe followed a day after the FBI contradicted the White House over the Porter accusations. The FBI said it gave the Trump administration information on multiple occasions last year about Porter and that the investigation wrapped up in January.

That account by FBI Director Christopher Wray challenged the White House assertion that Porter’s background “investigation was ongoing” and officials first learned the extent of accusations against him only last week, just before he abruptly resigned.

tions inside the White House.

Privately, officials acknowledge that the public timeline offered last week — that the administration first learned of the ex-wives’ charges against Porter last Tuesday — was flawed at best.

Several senior officials, including chief of staff John Kelly and White House counsel Don McGahn, were aware of the broad allegations against Porter for months, officials said.

Kelly found out after requesting an update on the large number of senior staffers operating without full security clearances, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal discussions. McGahn told Kelly last fall there was concern about information in the background investigation involving Porter’s ex-wives, the official said, and Kelly expressed surprise that Porter had previously been married.

Despite that, Porter took on an increasingly central role in the West Wing and was under consideration to serve as Trump’s deputy chief of staff, two officials said.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters Monday, “The White House had not received any specific papers regarding the completion of that background check.” Yet Wray testified that the FBI sent the White House its preliminary report in March 2017 and its completed investigation in late July. Soon after that, the agency received a request for a follow-up inquiry, and it provided that information in November. Porter was interviewed about the allegations in September, an official said.

Zinke Accused of Hiding Key Facts in Overhaul

**By DAN ELLIOTT
Associated Press**

DENVER (AP) — Two Democratic congressmen accused Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke today of withholding key information from lawmakers while launching a massive overhaul of his department.

Reps. Raul Grijalva of Arizona and Donald McEachin of Virginia sent Zinke a letter demanding he freeze the reorganization until he provides more information to Congress, which has the final say over the plan.

The letter accuses Zinke of trying to implement the plan piecemeal “to avoid full scrutiny by Congress.” It says Zinke promised to provide details in budget documents released Monday but did not.

“Those assurances were not honored,” the letter says.

Zinke’s spokeswoman, Heather Swift, said the department does not yet have a final reorganization plan.

“The congressmen are mistaken,” she said.

Swift also said Jim Cason, the department’s associate deputy secretary, briefed Republican and Democratic congressional staff members on the plan in January.

The reorganization could have widespread impacts in the West, home of most of the resources the Interior Department manages: a wealth of public lands, water, wildlife, parks, archaeological and historic sites, oil and gas, coal and grazing ranges.

Zinke, a former congressman from Montana, wants to relocate many of his department’s top decision-makers officials from Washington, D.C., to still-undisclosed cities in the West.

The draft plan, provided to The Associated Press by the Western Governors Association, reorganizes the department into 13 regions based on rivers and ecosystems instead of the current state boundaries.

Grijalva and McEachin are members of the House Committee on Natural Resources.

Six Republican members of the House Natural Resources Committee told Zinke last month they support the

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Jude Pate (Sentinel Photo)

Senate GOP Rejects Gov’s Pick for Vacancy

**By BECKY BOHRER
Associated Press**

JUNEAU (AP) — Alaska Senate Republicans have rejected Gov. Bill Walker’s nominee for a vacant Senate seat.

Walker will now have 10 days to nominate someone else.

He had chosen Randall Kowalke (coh-WAHL-kee) to replace former Sen. Mike Dunleavy, a Wasilla Republican who resigned to run for governor. Kowalke applied for the seat but wasn’t one of the three names sent to

Walker by Republicans in the district.

Appointees must be from the party of their predecessor. When a vacancy occurs, parties traditionally send the governor names though he’s not bound to them.

The pick, though, is subject to confirmation, in this case, by Senate Republicans.

Senate Majority Leader Peter Micciche says the people of Senate District E should be able to fill the seat with someone they support through the traditional process.

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in observance of

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